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Interview with Robert W. Garrity

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series

ROBERT W. GARRITY

Interviewed by: Hans N. Tuch

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Q: Good morning, Bob.

GARRITY: Good morning, Tom.

Introduction by Interviewer Hans N. Tuch

Q: By way of introduction, let me just say that Bob was born in Boston, went to Boston College, graduated in 1957, entered the Foreign Service in 1965, and served first in Vietnam. He has already done an oral history interview which covered his period in Vietnam.

He then served in Munich from 1967 to 1970, in Iceland from 1970 to 1973, at CINCPAC in Hawaii from 1973 to 1976, in Washington with the Television Service from 1977 to 1978, and then, following a year of Japanese language training, he served in Japan from 1979 to 1983 as the deputy public affairs officer. His final four and a half years in the Foreign Service were at the Foreign Press Center, in charge of the Foreign Press Centers in the United States, from 1984 to 1988.

At the present time, he is the Executive Director of the Associated Japan-American Societies, Inc., which brings us to the topic that we want to discuss in some detail today, namely his service in Japan and his whole involvement in public diplomacy in Japan. We will later discuss the subject of his service and work with the Foreign Press Centers in Washington and other places in this country.

I am fascinated by what you will tell me about Japan. I have never served there. I visited there once. I discovered at that time that I never would want to serve in Japan, because I believe it takes a lifetime in order to understand Japan, the Japanese, their culture, their traditions, their language. Therefore, it is of particular interest to this project to explore how we, as an American society, in our involvement with Japan, deal with the Japanese, how we can deal with the Japanese, and how we can serve the purposes of public diplomacy in Japan.

Tell me, how did you get interested, and why did you get interested, in Japan in the first place?

GARRITY: I think the interest was probably common to my wife and me. Comparing notes, it started back in childhood, reading and so forth. It really hit us en route to our first assignment in Southeast Asia, because our first stop outside the United States was a 24-hour layover in 1965, with our three small children, in Tokyo. I remember my wife saying at that time, “Some day you've got to get assigned here.” We just never forgot Japan. Of course, in those days it was still under construction. They had had their 1964 Olympics and did very well. Tokyo, in 1965, compared with when we went back in 1979 they were two totally different cities.

Q: I was there for two weeks in 1955.

GARRITY: When there wasn't much city at all!

Q: That was the only time I've been there.

GARRITY: So I guess you get a feeling about, and an attraction to, a place, and the contrast. I think we returned to Japan on the way back from Vietnam, and my wife was posted in Bangkok with the children. Of course, the contrast between Japan and Southeast Asia is quite extraordinary.

Comments on and Comparisons of Japanese and American Cultures

Q: Yes. The reason I am so interested in this is that in all our dealings with Japan, both governmentally and non-governmentally, it appears to me that we have often thought in terms of dealing with Japan as our Secretaries of State—Kissinger comes to mind, specifically—deal with the Europeans. However, it appears to me that you are really dealing with an entirely different culture, with a different world, and that one has to take that into consideration if you are ever going to do any good—let's put it that way—in Japan for your own country.

What do you think is the essence of how we should approach our relationship with Japan?

GARRITY: I think there's a danger in being overly mystified by Japan. The Japanese themselves, over many, many years, contributed to the feeling that they're very difficult to understand—really, for foreigners, impossible to understand.

Q: They convinced me. (Laughter)

GARRITY: Their language is “impossible for anyone to master.” It's a very difficult language. It's difficult for the Japanese. I'm not saying that as one who mastered it. I was shortchanged on the language training and only got the half of it, and that was the lesser half in Washington.

But I think that compared to Americans and American society, Japanese culture and society is more easily available and more easily understood than our own. We are much more complex as a society. On the other hand, I think there is a tendency to think of Japan as just one big homogenized mass of people. That's not true, either. My experience in Japan, because of having supervision of our Cultural Centers—which we don't call Cultural Centers anymore; we call them American Centers, whatever that means—I think the contrast in the different parts of Japan can be very marked, to me. The rich historical tradition in Kyushu, the outward-looking and very different kind of attitude among the people in Hokkaido, which is more recently settled, sort of the California or the last frontier of Japan.

It's an exciting country to experience. Obviously, understanding the culture is essential to dealing with Japan. There are a lot of Americans who do understand that. There's a tremendous amount of expertise, not as much as we would like to have, but more than we realize we have. Nevertheless, coming to Japan later in a career rather than at the beginning, as most Japan hands usually do, I made it my point to see Japan and try to accept it as it is today, rather than being burdened by what it was like way back then. And this incredible economic miracle, it's all done. I think we have to deal with Japan as it is now, not agog over what they've accomplished compared to what they were forty years ago.

Q: In our relationship with Japan, do the Japanese have an easier time understanding us, dealing with us, than we with them?

GARRITY: I don't think so. I think that they learn to deal with certain patterns and traits of Americans, but I think there are very few Japanese who really understand the United States.

Q: But superficially—just superficially—we have a relatively small number of Japanese-language officers both in the State Department and USIA, who can deal with the Japanese

and Japan in their native language. I don't think that there is a Japanese salesman, whether they sell computer chips or Toyotas, who would think in terms of dealing with Americans in this country without speaking fluent English.

GARRITY: That's right.

Q: I mean, isn't this one shortcoming that we have as a society, in that we are reluctant? Maybe we realize it now more than we did in the past, but that we shortchange ourselves in not dealing with, say, the buyer of our products on his own terms and in his own language. We expect them to speak English and deal with them in our terms rather than their terms. Do you have any comment on that?

GARRITY: I think that's been a tradition. We were not traditionally an export country. We sold what was left over from the American market. Quite a contrast between that and other nations' approach, where they actually research the foreign market and manufacture to suit that market. We are learning how to do that, but it certainly has not been a tradition in the United States.

Q: From your point of view and from your experience, how, in the area of public diplomacy, that we were involved in, what do you think we have done wrong? What do you think we have done right? And how do you think we ought to approach the future?

GARRITY: Our public diplomacy, as practiced with Japan, has really been driven by policy. We are supporters of policy. Our job is to explain policy, as well as explaining what makes Americans tick, as we do everywhere. Policy isn't necessarily made by people who know anything about Japan. As a result, the pattern over many years in our dealings with Japan is an intense kind of focus on very small issues. So we've really dealt microcosmically with Japan, where the Reischauers and the Ezra Vogels of the world see a macrocosmic view of Japan and know all the issues as well. The official policy has never really come to grips

with the macro view of Japan. So as a result, we have concentrated so heavily on whether there is access in the Japanese market to particular American manufactured goods—

Q: Let me stop for just a moment. [Tape recorder turned off]

GARRITY: I think I found it very useful to come to Japan when I did. I suppose it was kind of a quirk. The assignment, I believe, was made purposely by John Reinhardt, the director at the time, to actually bring in someone who hadn't been there before on assignment and, in a sense, bring a stranger into the club.

Q: You were there before David Hitchcock?

GARRITY: David was there for the last two years of my stay, and the first two years, Cliff Forster was PAO.

Q: Both Japan hands, so to speak.

GARRITY: Yes, long assignments in Japan and fluent in the language.

Q: Is David fluent?

GARRITY: Oh, yes, and very, very good on the culture, very strong understanding of Japan.

Q: David has written quite a bit about Japan. As a matter of fact, I am going to try to interview him, also, although he is not yet a retired person, but anticipating his retirement.

The Excellence and Values of American officers in USIS Centers

GARRITY: I would say that the people assigned by the Agency in Japan, particularly the American Center directors—maybe I'm just judging from my own experience there—having division of labor with the PAO during my time; I had charge of the Information Division and in the Information Centers, plus just the overall concern for the post—the

Center directors, in my experience, were some of the most outstanding Foreign Service officers I've come across, without exception, very, very able in the language.

Q: That seems to parallel my experience in Germany, when the Amerika Haus directors, in my view, were sort of the engines that drove the program in Germany.

What was the major thrust during your period in Japan, which was the four years between 1979 and 1983? Mike Mansfield was the ambassador during the entire period.

GARRITY: Yes.

Q: What was the main thrust of the USIS program in Japan at that time?

GARRITY: Let me preface that by saying, working as an Amerika Haus director in Munich gives you a very special connection to anyone else who has ever been an Amerika Haus director or an Information Center director. It's probably—going back over everything—the best job they've ever had. It's the most fun.

Q: Exactly! The most fun. (Laughter)

GARRITY: The most fun. It's twenty-five hours a day and you never regret a minute of it.

Q: But you do think that's what you would normally do for recreation. (Laughter)

Contrasts Between Program Emphasis in American Centers in Japan and Germany

GARRITY: Right. (Laughter) The contrast, of course—and I think it's probably a contrast with the program in Germany today—we had a program in Munich which was markedly cultural. We covered all the issues, but we had a very rich cultural program, as well. That was less true, I think, in Japan, although we did have cultural presentations, visiting artists. Certainly the heavy concentration was on the issues that were driving the bilateral relationship.

Q: In other words, you were involved in really supporting the economic, the political, the security issues which were in the forefront through programs that you did in your centers or through exchanges.

GARRITY: That's right. I particularly did a lot of work with the Japanese media around lunches that I would have at my home. We had a steady stream of government officials who I would try to get together with the appropriate Japanese media.

Q: Was it easy or difficult to deal with the Japanese media? Were they receptive to your approaches?

GARRITY: Oh, yes. Very much so.

Q: I noticed in Germany, no self-respecting German editor would ever use a piece of wireless file material in his or her newspaper, whereas in Brazil, even in the most respected newspapers, even under the absence of censorship, would take a wireless file and slap their own correspondent's name on it and publish it as though it were their New York or Washington correspondent. Did the Japanese, for instance, use the wireless file?

Japanese Media Use of Wireless File Material

GARRITY: They certainly understood what we were doing with the wireless file, and it was not an object of suspicion in that sense. They found it most valuable as a record of policy statements.

Q: Source material.

GARRITY: Source material, texts for speeches, presidential speeches, and so forth.

Q: In other words, they used it, say, to write editorials, because the wireless file was the one resource that provided full text, which the AP or other wire services, if a president

gave a speech or a secretary gave a press conference, would provide a story, not the authoritative text.

GARRITY: They have several of their own international wire services and their own correspondents, plus, of course, access to AP, Reuters, UPI, Tass, you name it. I mention Tass, which has become a little more respectable now than it used to be. Nevertheless, the value that the wireless file offered—and it was invaluable—it's a full text that you just wouldn't get from any other source that quickly. That's what we really tried to stress with Washington, to keep those texts coming, keep the policy statements coming.

The Immense Value of Exchange Programs in Japan - Especially the Fulbright Exchanges

Q: Talking about the wireless file and the importance of the centers and your program in the centers, what were some of the other things that were particularly effective? Exchanges or the Fulbright program?

GARRITY: The whole exchange apparatus is gold, as far as I'm concerned. When I first went to Japan, I approached our cultural attach#, who was a fine man by the name of Sidney Hamolsky, who is now retired in southern California.

Q: We served together in Brazil, where he was the cultural attach#.

GARRITY: Very, very devoted. In my naivete, I said, “Sid, could I have a list of all of the exchange programs between Japan and the United States?” Not just ours. (Laughter) He laughed and said, “Anyone would give their life, practically, to get such a list, because there are so many exchanges on so many levels, that nobody has ever compiled one.”

Q: Did the government program of exchanges, whether it's the Fulbright program or youth exchanges, did it make an impact? Was it important, what with all the other exchanges going on?

GARRITY: I would say so. It certainly had a lot of visibility. The prestige that's attached to being a Fulbright exchange scholar, for instance, is just enormous. During my time in Japan, a national organization, an Association of Fulbright Alumni, was formed.

Q: In Japan?

GARRITY: In Japan. The alumni had met together in various regions around Japan, but it became a full-fledged national organization and a fund-raiser. There was a very sizable grant that started all this off, by a man named Yoshida, who was the head of YKK, the foremost fastener company in Japan, maybe in the world. We always called him the Zipper King. He was the first man to set up a plant in a place called Georgia, when a man named Jimmy Carter was governor. They established a friendship, and really, in honor of President Carter, he donated $500,000 to the Fulbright Commission. You may not know, but in Japan, such donations are not tax deductible. Not only that, they are taxed. So he probably had to pay an additional $50,000 on his donation. But it really got things going.

There was a thirtieth anniversary of the Fulbright program. Senator Fulbright came to Japan for the occasion, and I would say that the attention paid to the Fulbright program and the organization of the alumni and the fund-raising that went into it got a lot of publicity.

Q: That should have been an interesting occasion, because Mansfield and Fulbright saw eye to eye on most issues, didn't they, when they were in the Senate? Were they friends?

GARRITY: I would say that Ambassador Mansfield considered himself, and was considered, a first-class colleague by all of the incumbents and former members of the Congress. Just a remarkable rapport. We had so many visitors actually serving in Congress or having had congressional service, who came through Tokyo. Without exception, in my memory, anyway, they had apparently a warm feeling with Mansfield.

Q: You and I both had the good fortune of serving with non-career ambassadors, politically appointed ambassadors in our respective last posts, you with Senator Mansfield, I with Arthur Burns. They really, as far as I was concerned, were inspiring and really made, in my case, the last few years in the Foreign Service a particularly interesting and satisfying experience to be with people like that.

GARRITY: That's true. I think in the case of Ambassador Mansfield, he prided himself on coming into the Congress first as a representative, then as a senator, from the academic world. This was a very important distinction for him. He was a professor at the University of Montana.

Q: So was Fulbright.

GARRITY: Right. So this gave him a natural feeling about the Fulbright program or the exchange programs. Certainly he was a very strong supporter of the YFU exchange programs, and particularly got involved with the Senate-Diet exchange program.

Q: By way of explanation, that was a program where the Japanese Government invited each senator to nominate one youngster from his or her state to spend three months in the summer in Japan under the auspices of Youth For Understanding, and in turn, then, the US Government decided to reciprocate by inviting a number of Japanese youngsters between fifteen and eighteen from each prefecture in Japan. That was called the US Senate-Japanese Prefecture program, which, unfortunately, at the present time is coming on hard times.

GARRITY: So I hear.

Q: Yes, because both governments are reluctant in their funding of this program, and I think it's so valuable. Ambassador Mansfield made it a practice to say "sayonara" to the Japanese as they went off to the US, and to greet the American exchange students as they arrived in Japan. There was no question that he considered this a very, very

important program. The caliber of the students was just overwhelming, and the impact that they made in their communities was quite profound.

Q: What programs didn't work?

GARRITY: What didn't work? You know, we have a funny situation in Japan. The American companies who do business in Japan successfully don't really like to talk too much about why they're successful, because they don't want any of their competitors to get their secrets. But the companies who fail sort of steal away in the night and they don't want to talk about it at all. (Laughter) So programs that don't do well, they tend to disappear and be forgotten.

VOA Broadcasting to Japan Would Have Been Useless

Q: One of the reasons I'm asking the question is because during my time at the Voice of America, there were those, including the then director, who really wanted us to broadcast the Voice of America in Japanese, because he felt that the Voice of America was a global radio network and we had to broadcast in all the major world languages. He felt that way also about German and Italian and French.

I always opposed that, because I felt that spending resources—and they would have had to be considerable resources—on starting again to broadcast in Japan, it's a media-saturated society, I felt, especially by radio. Secondly, it is a free society where people have access to all kinds of views and news and information not supplied to them only by the government. Thirdly, I felt that it would take us so much time and effort and money to build an audience in this media-saturated society, that I thought it would be a waste of resources to broadcast in Japanese, and instead, we should spend our resources on programs which would be much more effective in the cultural communications process.

As long as I was there, and I think even now, I mean, my view prevailed, but it was a sore point with some people that we were not broadcasting in Japan.

Q: I think clearly a Japanese-language broadcast would have been, in any case, unnecessary and certainly not worth the cost. There were maybe half a million Japanese listening regularly to Worldwide English on VOA. There are aficionados of shortwave radio all over the world, and Japan has their percentage.

Q: But these were not the target audiences.

GARRITY: Not necessarily. No, I think these are people who are just interested in tuning in around the world and getting BBC or whatever. There's no question that Japan has access to worldwide information, either directly from their own representatives around the world or subscribing to other news services. Building an audience for a Japanese-language broadcast by VOA would have been unnecessary—unnecessary completely.

However, Television - of Certain Type of Programs - Has Value

Q: How about television?

GARRITY: I think television, as we gained expertise in the two-way satellite operation, for specific events, was useful. For instance, the first program that we put together, working with Washington on a satellite broadcast, was with the Secretary of Defense [Caspar] Weinberger. I remember this vividly. I'm not sure it's something I should talk about. (Laughter) The cable came from Washington saying, “How would you like to have the Secretary of Defense?”

“Sure!”

They were willing to put money into up-leg and down-leg. It was kind of one of the first programs and they wanted it to work. Well, I got together with our press attach# at the time, who was Bill Moyers, who is in personnel right now. You might go to Bill Moyers and check whether I remember everything correctly. But we got ourselves over to NHK, which is the big non-commercial network, somewhat the equivalent of BBC and much,

much bigger than our own PBS. I didn't bring money up at all. I mean, I would have killed the deal if I had raised the subject of money. NHK has so much money, they don't know what to do with it. When they heard “Secretary of Defense,” they said, “Great!” They had a program already on the schedule, where they could just tie him right in. In fact, the first thing they wanted to do was just carry it live. We subsequently did record it and then put time into a really good translation. Simultaneous translation can be a risky business, a high-wire act. So eventually that's the way it did work.

NHK picked up the entire tab for their end, and I must say there was kind of a begrudging attitude on the Washington end, in that they didn't get to spend all the money that they had in mind. (Laughter) Rather than thanking us for saving them money!

Q: Worldnet, which it finally developed into, was its purpose as Charlie Wick envisaged it initially, as a newsmaker? Was its value as a newsmaker or was its value more in the way that it provided an opportunity for people who could not come in person and go around and talk to a lot of people or to communicate as sort of a specialist in a subject and thereby provide the information and the contact that they could not provide in person? Which one?

GARRITY: In my view, the latter, certainly. Newsmakers, that's covered by commercial, already existing communication lines and networks. The real value, to me, of the technology was not this daily program, which is just sort of a poor imitation of the “Today Show.” The real value was in getting the counterpart to the Japanese expert on the other end of the tube and giving them a chance to really talk. I think that it gave an immediacy that you just couldn't get otherwise. We've done the same thing on telephone lines, which may seem primitive, but in its own way could be very, very effective.

Q: It works.

GARRITY: It works. I mean, there are very successful talk shows in town today that don't have television and yet work beautifully. So I think whatever means electronically you have

to bring our people together with Japan and wherever, fine. Television adds to it, but I think the real value is not the regular scheduled program, but the event-by-event—

Q: In dealing with the Japanese, in your programming with the Japanese, was the factor of language a major element? In other words, did you really have to do things in Japanese?

GARRITY: I would say most of the time we did things in Japanese. That doesn't mean all our American speakers were able to come over and speak in Japanese. But we put a lot of effort into translation and interpreting.

The USIS/Japan Magazine, “Trends,” Was Great Success

Q: How about publications? Did you publish anything?

GARRITY: First of all, we had an outstanding magazine which somehow managed to continue to exist during an era when the Agency was considering one-world materials, which seemed to me to be the ultimate in nonsense, to consider that one piece of material is suited to every audience in the world [See interview of Stanton Barnett in this series on this subject. The idea was sometimes called “the Global Village” concept, that all intellectuals worldwide have similar interests and reactions to the same idea]. (Laughter) How an agency with so much knowledge could ever come to such a conclusion was beyond my understanding.

The magazine Trends was geared to a Japanese audience, primarily reprints of appropriate American articles, but also there were articles commissioned for the magazine with American writers.

Q: In Japanese?

GARRITY: They would be written in English.

Q: I mean the magazine, Trends, was a Japanese-language magazine.

GARRITY: Yes. In fact, it won several awards for design, which were richly deserved. We were very fortunate to have a succession of American officers, publication officers, who were immensely talented and devoted to keeping the magazine up to high standards, and a very devoted Japanese staff working on getting the magazine out, and some awfully good translators who were able to get these articles and re-rewrite them. I don't really like the word “translate,” because you can't translate—maybe in some languages it works, but in Japanese you can't just translate from English to Japanese. You have to take English and put it into Japanese to make any sense. I think that Trends was an outstanding example of a successful magazine that really communicated and went to a very, very important opinion-making audience.

Q: Before we go on to the other subject of concentration this morning, is there anything else you would like to mention?

DRS (the Distribution Record System) Vastly Outweighed the Return in Program Effectiveness

GARRITY: Yes, I'd like to make one more comment on my experience in Japan. You asked were there any programs that didn't work. I would say that although there's a need, as we all know, to keep track of your audience and be sure you're communicating with the people you are supposed to be communicating with, the intensity with which we were expected to work with our audience records, the DRS, distribution record system, vastly outweighed the return.

I'd have to go back to the system, when I was in Germany, I think it started in the Defense Department, of audience recordkeeping. I think it started under [Robert] McNamara, and it had initials which I cannot remember. I remember there was a dispute when I was in Germany, about statistics, that an inspection team noted that we had been showing films to members of the German military, to the point where audiences exceeded the number of

personnel in the entire Germany military. What we were doing, obviously, we showed five films to 500 people; that counted as 2,500. (Laughter)

So the DRS thing, I suppose was an attempt to become more honest and have a better accounting of what you're doing. But it got so totally out of hand that for two years I don't recall ever having a conversation of substance with our desk officer. It wasn't until Cliff Forster came back to Washington and became the area director and one of my center directors became the desk officer, we never discussed DRS again. We discussed issues and what we were doing about them.

Q: It was the perennial problem of the media taking over the substance. The framework was more important than the picture in it. There was a tendency for that. I used to keep my records in a show box, you know, in a card file. I think, probably—I'm not sure—but I think that has more or less, in the last few years, been regularized. People still think it's important to have a good record, but it's no longer the end in itself.

GARRITY: That's right. Well put.

Q: Let us continue now and spend a little time talking about your service with the Press Centers located in Washington, but supervising the other Press Centers. I think this needs a little bit of an introduction, because I don't think it is that well known to anyone outside of USIA what the Press Centers do, why they do it. So why don't you just start with that a little bit.

Nature, Purpose, Work, and Value of USIA Foreign Press Centers

GARRITY: I would also add it's not that well known within USIA. (Laughter)

Q: Right.

GARRITY: There were three Foreign Press Centers. The largest staff and the most active is probably the Washington Center. The center with the most correspondents on the roster

is in New York. Then the most recent Center and one which I will say more about later is in Los Angeles. It really is not a Center anymore; it's one person working with several hundred foreign correspondents based in Los Angeles.

There are more than 1,500 correspondents registered with the Foreign Press Centers in these three cities. These three cities really are where the bulk of foreign correspondents are posted by their news organizations. These are journalists who are assigned by their news organizations from, at the last count, something like eighty different countries, to cover the US from one aspect or another. I would say that the Foreign Press Centers are a very rich source of programs, information, and access, entre and so forth, for a great number of these journalists. Obviously, when you have a London Times or Asahi Shimbun Bureau, they are well able to make their own connections, although we have a good relationship with them. But some of the smaller bureaus need some help in covering. If you have one person trying to cover the whole story in Washington, it's almost an impossibility, so they really depend on the Foreign Press Center for briefings, for materials, for wireless file. I mean, interestingly, using it in the United States, it's a valuable tool for the correspondents.

Q: It always seemed to me, looking at it from the point of view of the field officer, and the first Press Center was in New York, wasn't it?

GARRITY: That's right.

Q: It was under Bill Stricker for many years.

GARRITY: It was started with the founding of the United Nations.

Potential for Stateside Press Centers Cooperating with PAOs Abroad is Great, but Inadequately Utilized

Q: Right. It always seemed to me, as a field officer, that the Press Centers could be tremendously important and effective for a PAO in another country, simply because it seemed to me that it would be much easier to deal with a correspondent of a publication or a television network or a radio network here—

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Q: It always seemed to me that as a PAO, it would be so much more effective for someone in Washington or New York or Los Angeles to deal with a foreign correspondent and provide him the information and the background and the ideas than it was for me or for the information officer to try to convince the editor, locally, a busy editor locally, about what I wanted to tell him. I always thought it would be also more credible if their own correspondent conveyed the message to the newspaper or the radio station, to their editors, than if the American officer tried to convince the local editor.

GARRITY: I think you're absolutely right, although among the major frustrations I had directing the Centers, probably the chief one was in not getting the acknowledgment of that from the field.

Q: Oh, really?

GARRITY: Very, very strange. We had many visits from PAOs who came back to Washington on home leave or whatever, information officers, local national employees, and it was all love and kisses during the visit, but that would be the last time we'd hear from them, except in the case of visiting correspondents. I should mention that the Press Centers handle as many correspondents as there are on the roster here, assigned here, but there is an equal number who come through each year and concerning whose visits we get telegrams from the field, “So and so coming. Would you please help? This is the story they want to get,” and whatever. This is aside from any exchange program or

international visit or tour or whatever. I mean, these are people who are coming on a temporary assignment.

So there would be recognition that we could help somebody coming here temporarily, but very little acknowledgment of what you just said, which is so true, of the value to the post of working with the resident assigned correspondent and the kind of assistance we could give them in covering stories which would be very important to the post.

We have no way of shaping news, but there are certain things we could do. For instance, as we all know, you can't cover the United States from Washington. Washington is a breaking political story daily, and for correspondents who are assigned here, we tried to put together ways for them to get outside of Washington for two or three days every so often, to cover other things.

Value of Press Tours Organized by Press Centers for Foreign Correspondents

When I first came to the Foreign Press Centers, I discovered there were no press tours, and I questioned this. The answer was, “We don't have any money for them anymore.”

I said, “Why do you need money?”

“If we don't pay the correspondent to go, they won't go.”

I said, “If the correspondent will not cover a story unless you pay him to, the story is not worth doing. We're supposed to put together programs with good stories. These are rich news organizations, and there's no question that they are well able to pay for their own trips. The only thing we should be spending money on is the cost of a program officer.”

Well, nobody believed it, but anyway, we started off and I was proven correct. Incidentally, the only nation whose correspondents would not accept free trips up to that point was

the UK. But Germans, Swiss, the richest people of the world would accept free trips. (Laughter)

Q: I think the UK is the same. I think the American press will not.

GARRITY: The American press will not. That's right. So we instituted what I hope is still going on, some very, very successful press tours. Probably New York has done the best job on press tours, interestingly. But nevertheless, I recall one of our program officers put together a press tour to Pittsburgh, and correspondents came back—well, Pittsburgh is an interesting example because ten years before it was the worst place, and ten years later it's the best place to live in the US. Correspondents were interested and wrote extensive articles, the kinds of articles that appear in weekend editions. They came in and showed me letters from their editors, saying, “Why don't you send stuff like this back more often?” Same editor who they had a fight with to get out of Washington for a couple of days.

There are so many cities in the world that can learn by what Pittsburgh did, that the story is just endlessly instructive. We also had a press tour that was incredibly timely, totally by accident. We had scheduled a tour up to Pennsylvania, the Dutch country, Three Mile Island, and so forth, a tour for two or three days. Just before they left, Chernobyl took place. So they arrived in Three Mile Island when the Chernobyl story was breaking. Absolutely! And the thing is, the Chernobyl story was made all the worse by the official reluctance to talk about it or own up to what was happening. They actually discovered there was a lot of that happened in Three Mile Island.

Q: Did the press from the authoritarian countries participate in programs with the Press Centers?

GARRITY: Oh, yes. Yes. In fact, the Three Mile Island trip provided one of the most unusual pieces of coverage anyone had experienced. The Polish correspondent filed a

story from that trip, and you realize how sensitive the Chernobyl thing was in Poland at that time.

Q: Right. Yes.

GARRITY: We got a cable from the embassy in Warsaw saying this was the best story in anyone's memory, you know, written from the United States about anything. It was so accurate and to the point and helpful and so forth and so on. The correspondent came in about two days later, and he was just beaming. He said, “Wait till I tell you! I just got a telegram from my editor that he's so happy with my story, and he gave me a bonus!”

So I said, “Ziggy, that's incredible. We just got a cable from the embassy saying this was the best thing written. How did you do this?”

He looked at me very straight-faced and said, “By writing very carefully.” (Laughter)

Q: Evidence of effectiveness.

GARRITY: Evidence of effectiveness. Right.

Q: What were some of the more routine things that were done through the Press Centers, and how effective, or what kind of evidence of effectiveness do you have on those things?

Closed Circuit Telecasts State Department's Daily Briefings Much Appreciated by Foreign Correspondents

GARRITY: One of the daily, effective things that we were able to present is a closed-circuit TV presentation of the daily State Department briefing.

Q: White House, too?

GARRITY: White House, as you know, is not televised.

Q: That's right. Just the State Department.

GARRITY: When the White House was televised, we would have it. What we'd do is have the White House on a telephone line so the correspondents would gather in our briefing room and listen to the White House.

Q: The old VOA.

GARRITY: That's right. We worked this through the VOA. This was very important, because not everyone could get over there. If you had a big bureau, then you had a guy at the White House. If you had a small bureau, then you could use the Press Center as the headquarters. So during the middle of the day, we would be swamped with people listening to the White House briefing, watching the State Department briefing.

Q: Were those State Department briefings also available in New York and Los Angeles?

GARRITY: We were working on that, but not—at least during my time. As far as I know, they're still not. We wanted to be able to have a TV connection, and it just never materialized. The audio is available in New York. In Los Angeles, it wasn't really necessary, because they're covering something different out there.

Q: And also the timing.

GARRITY: The timing is off. Yes.

Q: So these briefings. What else?

Foreign Press Centers as Reference Centers for Foreign Correspondents

GARRITY: I would say that the availability of reference material, the wireless file, working with program officers who are assigned by geographic areas to work with correspondents. People who work with Asian correspondents, European, Latin American, so forth, Middle

Eastern, they each have different needs and each have different requirements. We would try to get officers who had experience at posts in those areas coming back to Washington, assigned at the Foreign Press Centers, working with journalists from those areas. So they'd have it both ways. In fact, quite often a program officer would be working with a journalist whose material he had been reading or watching back in his post.

I think the most important element we had here was the personal relationship developed between these program officers and their journalist clients.

Q: Just like the press attach# establishing relationship with editors wherever they were serving.

GARRITY: Exactly. So the typical day for the program officers, what their responsibilities would boil down to, is working with the resident correspondents, helping them get appointments for interviews and so forth, that they may not be able to do on their own, as well as working with visitors, and then setting up briefings.

Q: Yes, that is something else I wanted to ask you about.

GARRITY: In Washington, the briefings, by and large, are on breaking issues. Sometimes you'll have a briefing on a long-range issue. But on issues of moment affecting current policy, you would have to put together something perhaps very, very quickly on a day's notice or even a couple of hours' notice.

Or we would get a call from the State Department saying, “We're going to be making this announcement and we'd like to send Assistant Secretary for Whatever over to meet with the foreign press this afternoon,” or tomorrow morning. And there was a recognition. We worked very closely with State and with the White House, as with other departments of the government, and found a very clear recognition of how important it was to have direct contact with the foreign correspondents, to be there in person, to brief them, and answer

their questions, rather than having them get information secondhand. I think over the four and a half years that I was with the Foreign Press Centers, this grew.

We cultivated our colleagues around town, but it didn't take much convincing once someone had come to the Press Center and met with the correspondents and found out these were truly the cream of the world's press. These are first-class journalists.

Q: And this was effective because these journalists were not normally invited or included in press briefings if they were given, say, by the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of State on their own turf?

GARRITY: Well, it's a combination. I would say probably they were—not everyone has a State Department credential, and the State Department was going through a period in the last few years where they're trying to cut down on the numbers of credentials around town, just simply because of the physical—for security and accommodation and so forth, as with the White House. There are just so many numbers you can accommodate.

So we were able to complement State's efforts, the White House's efforts, Defense's efforts by providing a place where the correspondents could come and get the same information. For a one- or two-man or two-person bureau, the ability to get your information at one location rather than galloping all over town. To get to a White House briefing and a State Department briefing is very difficult, because they follow one right on the other. You either go to one or you go to the other. At the Foreign Press Center, you could cover both. Now, maybe you couldn't get a question in, but if you had a specific question you knew you wanted to ask that day, you could go to the actual briefing. Most times you could cover it from the Foreign Press Center.

Q: As an effective public diplomacy tool, were the Press Centers recognized as such and accepted by the USIA management, by the hierarchy? And how does it look now?

GARRITY: I would say that there was acceptance, yes, but the acceptance wasn't always backed up with support. There were expectations for the Press Center to do all sorts of things, but when it came down to dealing out the resources, the Press Centers were always at the bottom of the heap.

Now, part of this goes back to the notable lack of recognition by the field posts. There were a couple of posts—Japan was one—that would regularly include things that they wanted the Foreign Press Centers to do as part of their annual plan. I think that was something I started when I was there. But most of the posts didn't, and they did not give evidence of recognizing what you so nicely pointed out before.

Q: You mentioned this one story as evidence of effectiveness. Any other anecdotes?

GARRITY: I would say one of the things that we were very successful with was reporting the White House in connection with presidential trips. They were very, very cooperative. Not just cooperative, but anxious to work with us on setting up pre-visit interviews.

Q: For the president.

GARRITY: For the president. We were able to do these in two parts: for the printed press and for television. What we tried to do was spread the wealth, and different correspondents had to wait their turn. If you did it this time, then next time somebody else would get the nod.

Q: That always became an issue with the German two televisions. They alternated.

GARRITY: Yes. We always got a nasty letter from somebody saying, “How could you possibly have given the interview to that person?” At one point in time, we had a terrible dispute with the embassy in Rome, because the interview went to a correspondent from the “wrong” paper. (Laughter) But nevertheless, I thought that was very effective.

We also did some very imaginative things, put together a first-ever press tour to Alaska, which got tremendous coverage, lots of cooperation from the state of Alaska, and literally cost travel for a program officer. In fact, it didn't even cost travel because she booked all the correspondents on Alaskan Airways, and they gave her a free ticket. The correspondents had to pay.

Budget Cutting Damage to Press Center Operations

I would say that one difficulty from budget cutting and so forth is that as we had built up a very viable operation on the west coast in Los Angeles, we were cut back and managed to retain only one American position for an FSO. But the correspondents out there, while they don't gather together regularly, are very responsive to press tours, much more so than to briefings. So a major activity on the west coast would be putting together press tours for the Los Angeles media and for the twenty-five or so correspondents in San Francisco.

One other point. We had an opportunity to set up a Foreign Press Center in Miami at very little cost. There was a World Trade Center being built, and we were going to be given space for the cost of utilities. Even the VOA was going to be able to use the space there. It did not get approved, unfortunately. We did some research in Miami and discovered that instead of the four correspondents people thought were there, there were more like 200, half of them European.

Q: Oh, really?

GARRITY: Yes.

Q: Nice place to live. (Laughter)

GARRITY: Well, covering Latin America from Miami.

Q: Yes, yes. It's easier than covering it from there.

GARRITY: We were told if we had put a Press Center together, the Asians would come in.

Q: Marvelous.

GARRITY: So for a very small cost, we could have had that. The return on your investment with the Foreign Press Centers is enormous. The cost is very, very small.

Q: On that note, thank you very much, Bob.

GARRITY: Thank you.

End of interview